ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
CASE FILE No.: AA-81911
EA NO.: AK-040-00-001

TYPE OF ACTION:	Airport Lease
LOCATION:	Seward Meridian T. 12 N., R. 34 W., Sec. 16, SE¼
APPLICANT:	Gary and Louise Pogany P. O. Box 770323 Eagle River, Alaska 99577
PREPARER:	Karen Collie, Realty Specialist
PREPARING OFFICE:	Bureau of Land Management Anchorage Field Office 6881 Abbott Loop Road Anchorage, Alaska 99507-2599
DATE:	March 27, 2000

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

An application has been received from Gary and Louise Pogany for an airport lease pursuant to the Act of May 24, 1928, as amended, and 43 CFR 2911. The purpose and need for the Proposed Action is to increase the safety of the clients flying in to the Osprey Lodge, owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Gary Pogany, by lengthening the existing runway. Because of the type of aircraft being utilized to support Osprey Lodge, a runway extension is required to satisfy safety requirements for twin engine turbine powered equipment. At the present time, operation of high performance, twin engine turbine powered aircraft can be marginal at best in adverse weather conditions.

B. Conformance with Land Use Plan:

The subject lands are within the Southwest Planning Area Management Framework Plan dated November 25, 1981. Activity Objective L.1-2 allows for the issuance of authorizations to satisfy transportation needs.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is to extend an existing airstrip, located on private land owned by Gary and Louise Pogany, by 1,000 feet in length and 150 feet in width (approximately 3.4 acres) on BLM administered land. The width includes a 100 foot width of airstrip and 25 feet on each side for ditching and sloping. The airstrip surface will be a mix of existing on site soil, gravel and rock. Construction will be conducted with a 350 John Deere bulldozer, a 310 John Deere backhoe and loader, a 5-yard dump trailer, and a caterpillar 12E road grader. The extension will be in the SE¼, Section 16, T. 12 N., R. 34 W., Seward Meridian (see attached map). Aircraft using the airstrip are C46; Casa turbojet twin engine (19 passenger); Volpar (turbojet twin engine); Beechcraft King Air; Cessna 206, 185, 180; and PA-18 (Piper Supercub). No fuel storage will occur on the lease area. Construction is expected to occur during the summer of 2000.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative is denial of the application.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

The following critical elements of the human environment are either not present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action:

Air Quality
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Cultural Resources
Environmental Justice
Farm Lands (Prime or Unique)
Floodplains
Invasive, Non-native Species
Native American Religious Concerns
Threatened and Endangered Species
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Water Quality (Surface/Ground)
Wetlands/Riparian Zones
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

1. Subsistence Uses Under Section 810 of ANILCA:

The proposed location is on Federal Public land as defined in ANILCA 102 (3) and is under the authority of the Federal Subsistence Board and the Subsistence Management Regulations for the Harvest of Fish and Wildlife on Federal Public Lands in Alaska. The specific proposed site for airstrip construction is not documented specifically as a site for subsistence resource harvest except in a general reference. Specific wildlife harvest between 1994 and 1999 indicate no contemporary harvest activity occurring within 8 air miles of the site. The site is of insufficient size or productivity to produce a sustainable yield of subsistence resources and does not pose a significant impact to subsistence uses or resources.

B. Soils:

Soils upon which the airstrip is to be constructed are well drained gravelly, soils with a thin albic horizon and a dark reddish brown to yellowish brown spodic horizon 8-12" thick, developed in very gravelly sandy loam or silt loam. While these soils generally have severe limitations for construction purposes, construction of a dirt/gravel airstrip that can be maintained through periodic

grading is an acceptable and reasonable use. Given that these soils seldom retain enough moisture for the formulation of ice-rich permafrost, frost heaving is not a problem.

C. Vegetation:

The proposed project would occur in the western foothills of the Alaska Range. Dominant vegetation in the area consists of low shrubs (willow/alder), lichens, sedges and mosses, with scattered, stunted white spruce. A preliminary rare plant survey was conducted in the Lime Hills and Cairn Mountain in 1999. There are no threatened and endangered plant species in the area. Based on that survey, it is unlikely that there are any rare or sensitive species in the proposed project area. Invasive weed species are not known to occur in the area.

D. Visual Resources:

The immediate area is relatively flat with hills in the foreground and mountains in the background. The area would be considered scenic but is similar to the surrounding area and not unique to this part of Alaska. This area is managed under a Visual Resources Management Class III Objective. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention, but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

E. Wildlife:

The proposed airstrip extension is within the Mulchatna Caribou herd's winter range where several thousand animals spend the winter in dispersed herds. Low densities of moose occur in the areas associated with willow shrubs and mixed forest. Predators such as wolves, and seasonally brown bear may be associated with the caribou herd. Lynx, marten and wolverine exist in the area, but are highly mobile and naturally occur at low densities. Resident and migrant land birds nest and feed in shrub and forest habitats.

With the exception of caribou, there have been no wildlife surveys completed in this area to determine numbers and distribution in the area of the proposed action. There are no known threatened and endangered wildlife species within the area.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Soils:

Construction of the airstrip extension will remove all surface layers of organic soil. These layers will never redevelop as long as the airstrip is in use and it is unlikely that they will return to pre-disturbed conditions following closure of the airstrip. The underlying gravely layers will be graded to blend in with the elevation and slope of the existing airstrip. Removal of the organic mat, and alteration of soil profiles, invites erosion if water is allowed to collect and run off from large areas. However, given the gentle slope of the airstrip and periodic maintenance required for safe aircraft operations, erosion can be minimal if the airstrip is properly graded and drained. Construction of the airstrip extension will remove all surface layers of organic soil.

2. Vegetation:

Approximately 3.4 acres of vegetation would be removed to construct the runway. The plans do not state what will be done with this material, but if side cast onto undisturbed vegetation, the total amount of disturbance would be greater. Runoff from the runway to undisturbed sites could cause a change in vegetation species or ground cover as site conditions would be wetter. Invasive weeds could be carried to the site on mud on aircraft wheels or equipment used to construct the runway extension.

3. Visual Resources:

Although this airstrip dominates the aerial view of this area, the proposed extension will pose little change since it will only increase the length. Initially, bare soil will contrast with the surrounding vegetation and be highly visible. The overall visual resources of the area will remain similar. From the ground, the airstrip is not visible except from a close distance or an elevated location. Man made objects will cause a visual intrusion if left on the strip.

4. Wildlife:

The impacts of clearing vegetation and leveling the ground on the airstrip

extension will cause a loss of shrub and tundra habitats. It will also cause a displacement of caribou, moose and land birds dependent on those habitats. The noise associated with the equipment used to clear and excavate the airstrip will also displace wildlife from nearby, unaffected shrub and tundra areas. Displaced animals may be more vulnerable to predators, thereby increasing mortality. There is potential for encounters with bears by persons working and living at the lodge and airstrip, increasing the chance of the taking of bears for the defense of life and property. There will be a loss of approximately 3.4 acres of wildlife habitat.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no impacts.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

There would be no cumulative impacts from the Proposed Action. However, a residual impact from the existence of the airstrip would remain.

D. Mitigation Measures:

1. Soils:

The airstrip should be sloped and graded to disperse excess water to the drainage ditches paralleling the airstrip. The ditches and their banks should be graded to handle water runoff with periodic water bars and water diversion features to divert water to the surrounding undisturbed ground. Topsoil from the airstrip should be spread over the ditch bank surfaces to promote natural revegetation. Vegetation removed from the airstrip and ditches should be used where necessary as an erosion control measure. If natural revegetation does not show rapid recovery within one to two years, seeding and fertilization of the ditches may be required.

2. Vegetation:

Disposal of vegetative material and topsoil removed during runway construction on undisturbed vegetation should be avoided. Excess topsoil and vegetation should be spread and smoothed over cuts or bare subsoil areas to allow for revegetation. If vegetation does not re-establish within

one to two years, seeding and fertilization may be required. Bare area should be monitored for invasive weeds and weeds manually removed to prevent establishment.

3. Visual Resources:

The visual impact can be reduced by allowing the vegetation to re-establish itself on the airstrip. Future maintenance should be limited to the minimum necessary to avoid disturbance to new vegetation. All dirt piles and bare areas should be smoothed to allow natural vegetation to re-establish. Man made objects should be stored at the camp to eliminate visual impacts.

4. Wildlife:

Impacts to the loss of wildlife habitat can be reduced by allowing natural revegetation to occur on those portions of the airstrip that are not frequently used by aircraft. Future grading should be limited to that portion of the airstrip essential to aircraft use and allowing low growing vegetation utilized by wildlife to establish on untraveled portions.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. List of Preparers:

Karen Collie - Realty Specialist
David Kelley - Surface Protection Specialist
Donna Redding - Archaeologist
Jeff Denton - Subsistence Specialist
Bruce Seppi - Wildlife Biologist
Debbie Blank - Botanist